



Youth Access to Tobacco



Tobacco is a serious danger to young people.

- Every day, more than 3,000 young people under the age of 18 begin smoking. One third will die prematurely from a tobacco-related disease.
(Centers for Disease Prevention and Control, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, October 9, 1998 and November 8, 1996)
- Symptoms of nicotine addiction can show up in young people within only days or weeks after occasional smoking begins, and well before daily smoking starts.
(DiFranza et al, *Tobacco Control*, 2000)
- A recent study showed that compared to those who did not smoke, youth who smoked cigarettes before the age of 15 were up to 80 times more likely to use illegal drugs.
(Lai et al, *Journal of Addictive Diseases*, 2000)

Preventing youth access to tobacco plays an important part in effective tobacco use prevention.

- A study of 14 Minnesota communities showed that enforcing ordinances to limit youth access to tobacco significantly reduced youth smoking rates.
(Forster et al, *American Journal of Public Health*, 1998)
- Two years after passing laws restricting youth access to tobacco, middle school smoking rates dropped in communities of Woodridge, Illinois. Seven years later, communities that continued enforcing access laws had lower rates of high school smoking than communities without regular enforcement, demonstrating that youth access prevention can have a substantial effect over time.
(Jason, *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 1999)

Existing laws to prevent youth access need local enforcement and supporting policies to be effective.

- California Penal Code §308 prohibits the sale of tobacco to persons under the age of 18.
- The STAKE (Stop Tobacco Access to Kids Enforcement) Act requires retail sellers to check the identification of anyone buying tobacco who appears to be under 18 years of age.

However...

- At least 75% of all cigarettes smoked by youth are purchased by youth, either through direct purchase, having others buy for them, or borrowing from other youth who buy directly. In California, 49% of youth that smoke buy their own cigarettes.*
(Centers for Disease Prevention and Control, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, July 9, 2000 & August 14, 1998; *California Youth Tobacco Survey, 1997)
- According to a recent survey, almost 70% of students who purchased or tried to purchase cigarettes during the past month in a store or gas station were not asked to show proof of age.
(Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 1999)
- Effective tobacco retailer licensing can help tobacco retailers clearly communicate that illegal tobacco sales to minors are unacceptable, and would level the business playing field.
(Surgeon General's Report, 2000)
- The federal Center for Substance Abuse Prevention recommends eliminating self-service tobacco displays. Adolescent success in buying tobacco is lower when all tobacco is locked or behind a service counter. Requiring clerk-assisted sales of tobacco also reduces theft of tobacco products.
(Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, *Implementing the Synar Regulation: Strategies for Reducing Sales of Tobacco Products to Minors*, 1998; Forster et al, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 1997; Wilkey et al, *Tobacco Control*, 1995)